



INSCAPES

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To
MY WIFE

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PART I

SMITHEREENS, 1937-1940

For David Gascoyne, in Memory of Abyssinia, China, Spain, Czecho-
Slovakia, Poland, France, etc., etc.

I

TO-DAY'S described by summer smell of air
Plaits of peatsmoke over lawns of wheat
The lean beast mouthing maize the spiral heat
The menace of the express train's
Stampede of wheels across the iron bridge

As down calm hillside rides the sullen news
Of private deathbed, public massacre
Murder of children wringing human tears
Scattering the gathered peace of afternoon.
Driving from vale to vale a flock of fear

To seize this hour, set order in the house
With mind not running over fast and loose
With surplus of desire, nor goad of need :
To realise so many fatal minutes
In which the purest of the passions meet
Must set mind staring lucid as a pool
Steadfast as field of ice or martyr's eye

The mind must, ripe, infolded but unfolding as
The immaculate pattern of the seed
With root in self and branch embracing self
Be brave to fire and flood, to the dangerous loves
Of flower and steel and the strange heart of man,
Thus dedicating flesh to a fair work.

II

To-day I remember you, Salvador Dali
 As the chains of my hunger and fear rattle in the darkness
 I remember the cherries I shared with Paul
 The hours when he understood when none would understand me
 When I had entered the arteries of your thought
 Becoming your Narcissus
 A poem that buoyed me on the high seas when the Channel ports
 Were rocked with thunder till the waves fled to sunshine
 As the lightning struck the paper verse after verse

And to-day I remember you, David and Roger
 Kenneth and Dylan and a dozen others
 Friends that are distant and difficult as brothers
 Friends that disown me, friends I shall never know
 For the planes wheel to-day and the noon casts a shadow
 And only the water and the rocks and the clouds know where they
 go

I am so hungry, but dare not be afraid
 I remember you, Salvador, in the days of hope and beauty
 But the blood that flowed in Spain has flowed in Flanders
 The tears that flowed in China flow in England.
 I asked for water and they offered me alcohol
 I asked for bread and they offered me a smile
 The transatlantic smile of successful flight
 Into the land of Never Never where the light
 Cleanses the rocks and bodies of their shadows
 I asked for love and they offered me a rose

I remember your hand poised with promise over the rainbow
 And the pool trembling with frenzy the eyes of a lost woman
 In the Rue de la Tombe Issoire
 And Gala came and went like a summer afternoon
 As the mountains rolled away in clouds of dust
 And the hand trembled a carnivorous plant in the foolish waters
 With the perennial reflection of Narcissus
 As our friends were dying in the lost peninsula
 But the sun stood and the rain fell clean and the world made an old
 circle
 As it does to-day, and I had understood
 That suffering can never be understood.

III

So many evenings
Sailors and mandolines on the Strata Stretta
Blond girls in Piccadilly, brown boys on Broadway
Hags on the Place Pigalle

So many evenings
North wind sharp in the cracking pines
Sleet in the jibsails of the fishing smacks
Lake ruffled crêpe de chine
Where the swan sings
Softly my lady sleeps

So many evenings
Huddled round the gas jet
Old women dying slowly by the fire
As the child leaps in the womb in the silent room
Where weary fingers are sewing to the bone

Outside, the amazing poverty of the world
Rags flap like poppies on the barren fields
There is no whispering in the workhouse park
Nor on the embankment where sleep the disillusioned ghosts
Outside, the amazing cruelty of the world
Fingers that break and drown, the snapping skull
Whose brain in smithereens disfigures heaven
While many a lover's heart beats on the road
Posthumous, and all the beauty with the strength has flowed
Into a silent world of tombs and flowers . . .

IV

UNCERTAIN slow to quick
Blood's perennial delta
Crosses the war-zones of the truceless heart
Barbed nerves check impulse, drive the hothead back
To coward stillness in the foreign dark

Where will man find a motive that might dare
The hanging sword and precipice of death?
Not in the cheated truth nor clock set back
Nor hero's calendar nor prophet's whim
For in the ruthless cycles of space and time
Man wages war on universal mind
That whistles like a tower in the wind
Mindless by kingsmen, hell's or heaven's angels

Wherefore I closed the petals of my soul
Learnt silence in the strait-jacket of love
And beat my fist no more on desire's door.

V

But creeps the arterial doubt
From street to street, spreading its tentacles
Through home and club, through den of thieves, raising
The pointed questionnaire of faith and fate

Band of pain clamps the brow, and hand
Stiffens on darling hand asleep beside.
Regret shall poison sleep and fray
The branching nerve and tender place of flesh

Leaf falls. Fruit falls. Tree falls.
All is a falling. Sleep falls, ghost of self.
Blizzard of light taps on the counterpane.
Far distance clearing. Clear. Sweet is
The smell of home, this household calm!
Broad daylight. Heat. Fire.
Flame. Fear. Remembrance
Of barbed wire, starshell, siren, mask, corruption
Haunting the nurseries and garden paths
Deepening the doubt

To what sad world, to what strange world
We wake, where rosy cheek and curly head
Are packed in crates.
Crater of hatred, unforgivable uncreatable
World, tenement of solitudes and deaths
To what sad world

Shall we say nothing
Shall we say we have nothing to say
Shall we pretend forever to pretend
Or turn the other way holding our noses?
Let us walk in the park pretending
Let us dare to kiss our children, let us drink tea.
Let us sleep together, be gentle with the roses,
Death is too serious for you and me.

VI

Cities of wood and stone
Stone men about you walked, mechanical statues
Staring with eyes of hate
Until the starshells burst, and they were gone

But woman of bread and wine and mother of pearl
Woman of gold and petals and phoenix feather
You are alone alive in this city of statues
Singing alone among the falling walls
Among the tottering domes and blazing homes

O foredoomed widow of all Europe's men
What are you seeking in my hollow eyes
In the paper faces of so many fallen stars
That shall not smile again

In you the molten rivers of the sun
And in your eyes two flowers
Green and blue, wild and open
In your eyes which seek me and shall find
Some noon, some midnight or some fine morning
Whether beside the devouring sea or in the longest street in the
world
Or better still, in the corners of your heart.

VII

HAND at plough plunge blade
To earthcore : make gold seed split
With green stem, hot bud burst
To the round fruit of life
Hind in field feed
Steers and lambs, and shepherd shear
The silver fleece of summer :
Farmer draw bright milk
To bless the nightfall

Cleave flames from stone
Whittle world white, clean seam
Screen vein, bind the sheaves tight :
Plane the hard knot, harvest the heart
Roof the earth over us, shelter us, shelter
Our child from fear, harness the flames,
Strengthen our weakness and make good our strength

Let us remember
This desolate day, this desperate
Legacy of our fathers, this manhood shed
To save us from ourselves.
Let us pass through
The circle of destruction
And stretch our heartbow to embrace the world.

FOR PAUL ELUARD

FLY easily, fly low
Into the sweet air's core
Straight from the root the magic towers grow
The offered body of the future waits

Where your horizons
Unfold the petals of an eternal eye
Where the world's shores
Cluster in the dark pupil
You call the sky
Into the silver steeples of your song

Sing easily and low
Where poetry is long and love is brief,
For in the listening places where you go
The walls will part for you, the stones believe.

SELF-PORTRAIT

CROSS-QUESTIONING square
Projection of myself
Circumscribes me where
I watch my bodiless half.

Blue eyes key me to fear
Whose informed scrutiny
Mirrors my despair
That such a chaos am I.

There drops a solid cliff
Of brow beating me down
With How, and But, and If
Till love sinks underground

To that basement of jaw
Whose ferro-concrete will
Sets me too strong a law
But buoys me when I fail.

What means that curling lip
Contemptuously kind,
Hungry for smile and kiss
But wilful, sad and blind?

Only at eye and ear
Does tenderness begin
Whose solitary care
Is to let beauty in :

While all the rest of me
The sex, the breast, the hand
Is friendly enemy
I dare not understand :

And the secretive heart
Through which my meaning flows
Throbs with an ancient hurt
That fells me with its blows,

Beats like a barren bell
Measuring me now,
Measuring my heaven and hell
At grips behind my brow.

A. E. HOUSMAN

LILIES drop into the grave
Their giant tears of death
Where the rusting fernblades weave
A scholar's humble wreath.

The roses still blow by the mill
But also fall and break
Starshells and bombs on ruined hills
Where homes burn, and hearts ache.

But you who craved eternal sleep
Safe in our hearts now lie,
For the world can make a dead man weep
But not a poet die.

LOCH LOMOND

An hour of water to the model village
Hot and cool prude among her shaly hills
Scattering her scarlet homesteads down the valley,
Fields in full fling before the autumn gales :

Impatient heather and fern crowd the horizon
Reflecting in the sky their outlandish tartan ;
The weekday village is houses but no men
The authentic church is locked, its idle steeple

Is now but a landmark for the lonely homeless
Tramp as he turns the last bend of Ben Lomond
To find but a Tudor pub and post-office open
And not one passenger in the waiting bus. . . .

I recall it is more than a lifetime but less than a minute
The final journey to the end of time,
And that I must travel alone the whole sad route
An alpine climber lost without a line,

And terrible that fall into eternity
—Which plots me the scale of these much advertised hills—
With, at the end, no church or pub to meet me,
Nor sound, not even a riddle of bells and rills,

Not the far cry of an owl or the beat of a heart . . .
A dog sleeps here by the bridge : the pub is closing :
I wait for the bus or the boat or the Moon to start :
Such days are memorable for a view of nothing.

FIRST OF SPRING

To-day for cheapjack, player of mandolines,
For the dark body surging from the mine,
For stunted tree, lame dog and lazy boy
Day shines, and lonely women eat marshmallows
And yellow as an orange is my joy.

Bells ring, larks sing, and clouds blow clear
Dried are the winter's tears and the last snows,
For Spring holds out a host of green to-morrows
Gentle on cheek and glistening in your hair
As you look at the roses the trees' wild fingers wear.

I eat the air and offer hands to shake
To friend and stranger for this morning's sake
To men with laces and matches on a tray
To the women who always look the other way
And to any who lit a fire before daybreak.

Light as the canter of a yearling's hooves
My song leaps roofs of houses, rings at doors,
Strides the brown hills, a whippet starting off
Over the meadows to the waving moors
Right round the rolling world in search of yours.

PALMS

FOR W. STOBBS

DOWN the deltas of the hand
All men must sail, to seaward gaze
With pilgrim's eyes, seeking a fabled land
Half mapped, each one's peninsula of fate.

Tracing those tributaries
Of chance, eluding sometimes and somewheres,
Never, and more dangerous by-passes,
Learning to counter strangers' cunning aims
Or whims, some day must colonise
One's fallow fields, claim swamps and abysses,
Anticipate the too-late.

Or ever calculating
Islands of pain and joy, must cancel storms,
Parry quick jaws of reefs, cliffs' ivory arms,
Keep the self level, verify all illusions.

Or else, observing and fearing the split heart,
Must follow its ghosts over the Mount of Venus,
Knowing too well what hurts
Best throw traitors in chains, what spate of deaths
Waits lovers who have sworn a two-faced oath.

Must learn how steadfast mind
Must insolently abjure
The blood's rebellion, to pass straight beyond
Straight as a die, those crooked miles of life.

Notice such items : a dozen fool's errands,
Three loves, two births, and, with good luck, one friend
Rare in four seasons or five continents.

HOLIDAY

THE lay cortege of
Free uneasy visitors
That centipeded through the labyrinth
Of half-day walls and bridges
And opened windows on the sooty sun
Lays down its hydra heads to sleep,
Is sleeping beauty on a shilling bed
Or counts its unspent minutes on floodlit faces.

Some also have wandered beside never before
Seen lakes and seas, have reckoned
A thousand areas of inaccessible spaces,
Have paid a ticket to where great men died,
Or hid their sorrows on a hired screen,
But now in disillusioned peace they lie
With a diminished life in a bruised purse,
Between to-day's insult and to-morrow's worse.

We are alone among a restless world
Awake, patching our battered wills
To brave toil and the friendless glance of strangers;
Walking together to meet the evening
Our double shadow between the sun and moon
Split on the fields, our voices by the hills
Baffled and scoffed, and the strange fate of man
Blackens the land, and sad are the cries of the gulls.

But beg you, stranger, love this closing day:
O hold the wriggling streets in your hot palm,
Pump Thames and Tyne through all your veins and hear
The night expresses riding swiftly home
Cargued with young men's hopes and old men's cares;
And hear the winds and a hundred rivers move
Down fen and highland washing England clean,
While we lie down to fight our fears, alone,
Tricked by the ugly truth and the impossible dream.

PART II

PETER PAN'S OTHER HALF

YONDER, yonder was a place
Sweeter than foster-breast
Or the half-focussed
Map of parent face

Blazed, dazzled the gelatine
Of ego-centric eye,
Grew to impossible heaven,
A small boy's fairy sky.

Stars tarnished here and there
—The harlot's glance was blue—
—Such heaven was in her hair—
But the dream came untrue.

Paradise proved a slum
Of an untidy mind,
So Peter followed the drum
As far as the front line.

Found there that Heaven and Hell
Are subtle propaganda,
Subtler than E. Sitwell
Or even Julien Benda.

His 'Heaven' was No Man's Land
(A Home for Dead V.C.'s)
For he was disillusioned
By an unmentionable disease.

Returned without a shilling
To the Land of Hope and Glory,
And died without ever knowing
His Shadow's bed-time story.

PROGRESSION

SEE that Satan pollarding a tree,
That geometric man straightening a road :
Surely such passions are perverse and odd
That violate windows and set the north wind free.

No doubt to-morrow the world will be too straight,
Five hundred knots an hour will churn our dreams
Like surprised whales, when we lie a dead weight
In an ignorant sleep, and things will be what they seem.

To-morrow we shall hear on the gramophone
The Music of the Spheres, registered H.M.V.
By a divorced contralto : we shall perhaps
Meet Adam under glass in a museum
Fleshless and most unlovely, complete with pedigree.

Or else, to-morrow, workers kings and crooks
Will all have aeroplanes and be fast friends,
In a world no longer divided by dividends,
Where love will be almost as simple as it looks.

EASTER

ALL things so gradually
Move from the median to an up-grade
The sun blows north, the snowflakes fall asleep,
Veridian swords rise from the confined root.

Branched bodies buried in the moonlit sheet
Grasp at the heart of hope in one another
Until the world grows dizzy between feet
And the pole-star swivels like a crazy feather.

But now the treacherous light brings beggars out
From under bridges, hedges, from the clammy shades
Of hunger, till their parasitic hands
Shine leprous clean, rubbing all pity bright.

Now loveless creatures lift dead faces up
In tower and prison, lake and sea and wood,
While waking lovers hear the cuckoo tell
The fears and treasons lurking in their blood.

WINTER

WHITE lies the frugal year
In shreds on the taut ground :
Pale through the waiting trees
The days pass thin and bare

So slowly moves our fate
Remorse rings in the ear
Always penultimate
Too soon, too far, too late

But while blood softly sleeps
Wrapped in, red squirrel,
Other to-morrows pull
All our hopes surely
To a new kernel

And in the midnight house
Or in the frozen street
Time is gathering close
His nooses round our feet.

FOR MY SON

TALL town wakes with the writhing
Subterranean traffic like a rabbit or lover in her
Though loverless spreads her girlish smoke like hair
To meet the day, and lifting ten thousand blinds
Opens her eyes to the sky.

And I, what part am I doomed to play this day
Shall it be the season of the pale body's wakening
To yet another overpraised summer or spring
Shall I watch merely before the house the maple prudish with leaves
Or is it a day for a suspicious mind
To question a babel of books, or pausing on the bridge
Will it be the heart's turn to wish it could understand,
Or must I cling to the railings, remembering a wound
Half healed from which there creeps a worm of doubt?

Day of too many choices, impossible day,
There seems not one when a man may step out whole
Mind, body, heart and soul.
I am only aware of the fact that I stubbornly exist
Through so many vicious circles of passion and fear,
And the city reels, and the sun rains on my hands.
Only in you, child, does a fragile promise of hope
Flicker almost erect in the silent room,
Grow suddenly almost articulate, and stop.

ON A DAY IN SUMMER

ON a day in summer is best for meditation
For meeting or leaving what, at best, is best,
In a floral dress beneath the fluttering maple
A woman, or an old home crumbling in the wheat,
As the wind's long fingers press towards the coast
Drawing a veil of tears across the eyes
As all the past echoes as a bell
In the solitude of downs and dunes where lovers lie.

Such a fair time is alone good for action
Is alone good for giving and possession
When the heart reels out in the wind on reckless wings
To circle over all that is loved and tightly held.
Around the vast trees mature and the marble hills
Like midday clouds look down : here gathers grass, flow flowers
Stippling the view farther than eye can tell.
O towers that I have yearned for, carved in old ivy, and these
dappled fields
You make the day worthy with sunwalls and silver rills
Worthy for all who cross the world to meet
All they most long for and discover not too late.

And on a day in summer those who too soon rejoiced
Must watch the sands dance as their hopes away,
And out of the sea hear some forgotten voice
That not long ago was so friendly and so gay,
And they must break the flowers and cry across the fells
Who can remember nothing but farewells.

ELEGY

QUIET, my darling whisperer :
There's been a death next door :
In the upstairs bedroom
The coffin lies on the floor

Here come twenty mourners
Dressed in black and sorrow
Who have asked for holiday
Until to-morrow

The women weep, the men are grave :
Look, there is her lover
Stepping into the high cab
Wishing it were all over

The hearse is full of flowers
The horses are well groomed :
There's still a smell of something
Up in that bedroom,

Something that will linger
Clinging to the walls
When the hail is dancing
On the immortelles

But here they are returning
To the burial feast :
With his wild eyes burning
The lover enters last

Over a cold sandwich
He weeps, but can't forget
The meaning he once found in
Hand and brow and breast

A meaning he'll discover
Lives longer than a girl :
He'll find it in another :
—Come, my peach, my pearl.

MR. SOLOMON'S IDYLL

'So happy to be with you' . . .
I am looking forward
In fact we're all looking forward
And soon the willow leaves will droop again
And the river there's so placid, if you only knew!

There will be parties on the river
(As Tennyson said, they have gone on for ever,
Only the bodies rise and wane)
And we shall see your benign face again
Shining so brownly in the Cambridge sun
And smiling at the music in the punt . . .

Then there will be those diamond sandwiches
That Sadie makes so better than her mother
"Oh, Mister Solomon, I'm sure you'll have another!"
—And many afternoons will go like these
With Mister Solomon gazing at the water
Eating cakes slowly without saying please.

UNPLEASANT POEM

PAIN in the bone
Tears in the blood
The heart of stone
In the corpse in the wood

The eye in the tree
The trap in the grass
It is death that I see
In the faces I pass

Love in the tomb
Flames in the air
Fear in the womb
Snakes in the hair

Groans from the tree
Nerves in the grass
It is grief that I see
In the faces I pass.

PART III

SERENADE

FOR J.R.

If you give me your hand
I shall take you with me down the red, red road
Where birds of Paradise hang by their toes
Watching the many colours of coming death.

I shall ask no questions if you tell no lies.
The bonus is paid with a stamp on quarter-day
And the demonstration waits with silken flags
With weeping files and many a magic flute,
And footsore love wonders why walls are blind,
Pretending to pretend, and changing its mind.

I shall not take you to pieces by the sea
Nor bury you skin-deep in crêpe de chine,
Nor feed you to the howling silver fox
Nor eat your apples, nor melt the golden keys,

But come with me along the one-way road
If life is the last meal you can afford.

PRECIOUS BEING, BEING PRECIOUS
SEVEN VARIATIONS ON A THEME
FOR J.C.

I

SPIRALLY a silence
Concentrates the room
Where your naked presence
Is root and branch of home

Lips from smiling flower
To the most velvet word
Though from the ivory tower
No nightingale is heard

Eyes are a surprise
For tears brim the kiss :
Tell me how the day dies,
How darkness merely is

Uncertain witness of
The blind limbs of love.

II

SILK colonnades wave and unfold
Less sepulchral their sable frills
That sexton night on eyelids rolled :
Now sits the Moon on windowsills

While through the white flocs of your sleep
Moves the incandescent dream
A warmer glory and more deep
Than all the laurel-sprays of fame

So coil the rippling ropes of love
Until your breasts are shooting-stars
That through eternal vastness rove
Filling the sky with nenuphars,

Before the Sun lays on your bed
Gold locks less golden than your head.

III

FAIR fleece to the floor falls
On a Turkish mosque,
Silken scabbard, South Sea pearls
On antique damask.

Without mocassin your step
Poses, pauses, poised :
All the minor arts of sleep
Stir in your silent noise.

Sharing all your solitude
To Nowhere I go,
Telling tales though stricken mute
A blind man who knows

The paradox of woman's form
Where flames freeze and ice is warm.

IV

CRYSTAL quivers where your look
Echoes as though a bell had pealed :
Quenched my candle, closed my book,
I need no light but you unveiled

But fade eclipsed when there you stand
Still planet of my private world
With Space tight in your little hand
And Time among your gold hair curled

Under the Virgin I was born
And lived and wrote beneath her sign :
But all the heavenly veils are torn
You hold the keys, you are the Nine,

So open me your magic doors
For I can live no life but yours.

V

WEARING shot-silk as the Sun
Whose regal robes fall purple off
Clothed in rainbows you alone
Conceal my heaven in blouse and cuff

Perennial sunset in your eye
Eludes all my sombre dreams
And shows me slowly how to die
As one who drowns learning to swim

I envy Oriental worms
Swarming round a mulberry
Spinning prisons for your charms :
But I weave spells to set you free

From clouds and shrouds of finery
And clasp a sunset in my arms.

VI

GLEAMS, my darling dreamer
Turn keys in Paradise :
Open now or close forever
The windows of your eyes

Sweetest reveries have gone
Round to the Antipodes
While a new beauty is born
In your real arms and knees

Your dreams must dwindle, kindling mine,
For yours are false, but mine are true :
Your dreams are human, mine divine :
You dream of me, but I of you.

Now you must wake, and kiss and play :
You dream by night, but I by day.

VII

MORNING swims across the pools
Where your dreams like fish are basking
Lovers follow all love's rules
Stealing kisses without asking

Asking favours without stealing
For only broken hearts cajole
Bogus sweethearts lost to feeling
Such as exile flowers in bowls

Shall I ask or shall I steal?
Neither, for your love is shaking
Night from golden head and heel :
There is such a thing as taking

Tenderness as freely given
As the sunlight out of heaven.

BILLET-DOUX

Looking through the blue key-hole of your eye
Into your lawn, the tall tree walks towards me
Hurls me fat fruit, eats me with caterpillars :
I am devoured by ants by hedgehogs by the owl's nostalgia
For love is hard, so very hard to forgive.
Your spirit crawls to me across the grass
Takes me with tentacles and buries me alive
Inside your heart : I write with your best blood.

DEFENCE OF GOTHIC

THE imprisoned mistress of the foreign ruin
Threw all her paper chains into the lake
Where swam the monster which once ate her man
And the tall tower leaned backwards like a neck

The night unfolded a volcanic lip
Showed ivory teeth and nailed me to the wall
So that the desperate white swords of hail
Pierced my Cyclops' face from crown to nape

Then I cried out my hate against the tower
And loved the woman of the forgotten storey
Who flung me pearls and led me secretly
Through the dark doors which opened like a flower

I slew the giant with the golden keys
And drove the black wings far across the lake
And now I am the master of the tower
Who stole the lady and wrote this for her sake.

PROTEST

ROUND the room swings when through the cheval-glass
Your laughter breaks and blights me seven years :
But as I have more than this mirror's tears
I cannot accept its fate and let you pass

Your hair I wind round maypoles, and your hair
I plait my dreams with, and all you say
Sweetens the climax of the bitterest day
For when you look away the night is there.

Hourly your dice are thrown and I am cast
With seaweed and the laws of chance beside
The creaking towers and the wishing-stones
Awaiting on this reef your changing tide

But there I see you smiling on the cliff
Watching me drown between two lighthouses
And as you smooth the furrows from your dress
You dig me a warm grave with your little hand.

THE MERRY WINDOW

THE alabaster legs of the lonely woman
Hang from the window like white ensigns
Out of the laughing window like false teeth
Sheets flagstaffs telescopes rolls of music
Or you would say beheaded necks of swans
Or the electric horns of factories
Where foreign dreams are nightly fabricated

Yearning for her coal once heaved in the seam
For her the sewers shrieked their way through London
And pigeons ate each other in the air

But the deserted lady is frozen to the marrow
Her heart has floated into her left leg
And her forked tongue asks in three languages
For a bassoon, a pyramid, and an egg

All the white birds have flown from her lips
The polar bear has eaten her left breast
Her eyes are covered with yellow webs of dust
In fact she is what a saint would call abandoned
Since even her own self has forgotten her.

ODE IN HONOUR

EVENING is part of the jigsaw truth of her
Plywood plyflesh, her insolent reply
Blinding the ace with a straight shot to centre
The woman's a delicate devil in twenty places
Blander and blonder, tinder tenderly
Setting the smiles on fire in men's faces.

On any evening gets you ready for dark
Swathes and saves you for the magic carpet
Spirits you anywhere anytime anyhow
Over the bridges the tunnels the hills the foothills
The pools lakes oceans cataracts crystal floes
The mountains the fountains the antique windows of space
The deserts orchards vineyards milky ways
Over pontoons and the silting tracks of moons
Over the decks and the docks where the clocks
Chime, anywhere, anytime, anyhow, any fresh place.

Anywhere where winds blow or babies grow
Where poor men wait for money in a row
Where gamblers buy and sell your heaven and hell
Anyhow whether the storm runs over the roof
Or hollow tooth aches or gangrene takes the soul,
Anytime when the sun splutters and throws shrapnel
Between the legs of dead men or mad lovers,
She will be there to take you by the cuff
To give you all her stock of luck or love.

With
Two round lips and two round eyes
And two round ears and two round palms
And two round arms and two round thighs
Any wonder, any woman,
Any surprise.

SO SMILE

LET the night pour quicksilver through your veins
Forget the yellow leaves on the wet panes
All creatures fallen into sleep or death :

Life moves so fast you cannot capture it,
But run and catch its shadow in your hand,
Snip locks, snap views and faces, hold your breath
As the wild spirit flies from land to land :
But turn not on your heel nor abandon it.

There is a midnight warmth in my crooked arm
So that each way you turn the heat is on
Hotter than feathers in each tightened palm :
So cross yourself, or cross this Rubicon.

There are no phantoms here by candlelight
Though doors strain open and the sky gapes wide
With all its ancient stars asleep inside :
So smile, so sleep, so dream : the centuries now
Are but a pillow for your weary brow
And the world wheels more surely than before.

PART IV

FROM NERVAL :

EL DESDICHADO

I AM the dark, the widowed, the unconsolated,
The Prince of Aquitaine of the silent tower :
My Star is dead : on the starred lute I hold
The sable Sun of melancholy glowers.

In my grave's gloom, my comforter of old,
Pausilippo and the Italian Sea restore,
The Flower that warmed my heart when it was cold,
And the rose and the vine united in one bower.

Am I Love or Phoebus? Biron or Lusignan?
My brow still burns with the kiss a Queen once gave ;
I have dreamt where swims the Siren in her cave :

And twice I braved the waves of Acheron,
Plucking on Orpheus' lyre the rise and fall
Of the Saint's sighing, and the Fairy's call.

FROM NERVAL :

MYRTHO

I THINK of you, Myrtho, divine enchantress,
In high Pausilippo, thousandfold flaring,
And of your brow with Orient brilliance flaming,
With black grapes mingled in your golden tress.

For it was from your cup that I drank bliss,
And in the furtive gleam of your eye smiling,
When at the feet of Iacchus I knelt praying,
For the Muses made of me a son of Greece.

I know why, yonder, the volcano flashes . . .
Because your fleet foot poised there yesterday,
And swiftly the horizon filled with ashes.

And since a Norman smashed your gods of clay,
Forever, beneath the laurel-sprays of Virgil
The pale Hortensia clings to the green Myrtle.

FROM MALLARME :

PROSE

FOR DES ESSEINTES

HYPERBOLE ! from my memory
Flushed with triumph can you not
Arise, to-day a gramary
In a book with iron wrought :

For I inaugurate, by science,
The hymn of spiritual hearts
In the labour of my patience,
Herbals, rituals and charts.

Our faces together roamed
(We were two then, I am sure)
Over many a landscape's charms,
O sister, matching them with yours.

The age of authority is troubled
As soon as, motiveless, one states
That of this midday which our double
Unconsciousness investigates

The hundred irises' bed, its site,
—They know whether it existed—
Bears no name that can be cried
By the gold of Summer's trumpet.

Yes, on an isle which the air loads
With vision but not phantasms
Every bloom spread vaster folds
Though we said not a word of them

So immense were they, that each
Ordinarily displayed
A lucid contour, a void which
From gardens separated it.

Glory of long desire, Ideas,
I was all overwrought to see
The family of all irises
Springing to this fresh duty

But she, discreet and tender sister
Cast her glance merely as far
As smiling : so to understand her
I employ my antique care.

Oh, may the Spirit of dispute,
At this hour when we are hushed,
Know that the myriad-lilied shoot
For our reasons grew too much

And not as laments the shore,
When its monotonous game lies
In wishing plenitude would pour
Into my immature surprise

At hearing all the sky and map
Endless attested by my steps,
By the same wave that draws away,
That this land saw no light of day.

The child resigns from extasy
And by various routes grown wise,
"ANASTASIA," she cries,
Born for eternal pedigrees,

Before laughs any sepulchre,
Her ancestor, in any clime,
At being called "PULCHERIA,"
Hid by the iris overclimbed.

FROM MALLARME :

POEM

HER pure nails dedicating high their onyx
Anguish this midnight as lampbearer holds
Many a vesperal dream burnt by the Phoenix
That no funereal urn shall ever enfold

On the sideboards in the empty room : no ptyx,
Abolished bauble of the loud inane
(For the master has gone to draw tears from the Styx
With this one thing that fills the Void with fame)

But near the window northwards gaping, gold's
Last agony is like perhaps a scene
Of unicorns that hoove fire from a nixie

She, dead nude in the mirror, even while
In the oblivion closed and framed is fixed
The sevenfold scintillation instantly.

FROM MALLARME :

POEM

VICTORIOUSLY the fine suicide is fled
Fleece of glory, blood through foam, gold and storm
I smile if yonder a purple is being spread
Regal to pall my unexisting tomb

What, of so great a brightness not one shred
Lingers, and it is midnight in our festive shade
Except that a presumptuous wealth of head
Torchless outpours its darling listlessness

It is yours, if ever delightful, it is yours
Who of the vanished sky alone enclose
A little childish triumph in your hair

Aglow when on your cushions it is posed
As a warrior helmet of an empress girl
Whence to portray yourself should roses fall.

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FROM RAYMOND QUENEAU :

OAK AND DOG

OAK and dog are my two names
A subtle etymology
But how remain anonymous
Among demons and deities

The dog is dog deep in the bone
Is cynical, indelicate,
—In my boyhood in a lane
I saw two terriers copulate

The animal scoffs and devours
Such are its native qualities
Is fierce, obeys its impulses
Cares nothing what its nose explores

The oak is dignified and tall
Is potent and majestic
It is green and quick with life
And stands triumphantly erect

The dog would fatten on acorns
If it left dustbins alone
But the oak-tree's branches strain
High towards heaven

Once in Paradise there was
A tree with knowledge for its fruit
But the snake rose at the root
And man's innocence was lost

I imagined in the wood
Some strange virility was hanged
From its sperm mandragora shoots
When night's bedlam is let loose

And now the dragon is flaming there
The Golden Fleece the emerald bowl
And its hominy-coloured hair
The precious stone dropped from its brow

Cerberus waits for its honeyed cake
Its name is out: it is a freak
A triple-headed guardian snake
With claws for nails and fangs for teeth

I must discover every sense
Of the ex-libris and blazon
The dog portrays the analyst
Identified in aggression

Consummate this narcissism
Bend your head down to the pool
—See here the flowering onanism
And here the homosexual

Symbols, individual works
This is no more than you deserve:
For you are mortal as I am
And only he who lives shall learn

Yet I shall live, since this man says
That he has made me clairvoyant,
And since I have the power to raise
The ghosts of the unconscious mind

They did not take leave of the world
But the world took leave of them
Nor have I disdained the unclean
Yet it has passed beyond my ken

What was repressed, dark, alchemic,
Once governing all my wills and ways
Is sublimated in the still
Of my passive hours and days

Horticulturalist and vet
Enters and assumes my fate
The dog goes down to Hell again
The oak rises to dominate.

PART V

NEW YEAR 1940

So long as morning shines and the trees' hands
Reach childishly to seize the light or the wind
And the river, as now, sings through the busy bridge
And sky's blue iris looks kindly on the town,

Hope throbs within me like a second heart.
It is hard to recall the shadow of death at my back
Or the losing of loveliness; it is harder and harder
To despise the hedging future or the past with its face of rock.

Now I can look at last without smug horror
At the innocent earthly heaven of my neighbour
Whose life was fulfilled in a dog and a racing car :
I am glad he ignores his failure, and still dares to swagger.

And such is the day, I had almost forgotten the poor
And the sick, at whose windows no trees dance with delight ;
For all who see hunger and fear where I see sunlight
I pray that to-day good luck shall find their door,

And that those for whom we cared shall never know
That our love, their love, was frailer than snow or glass :
To-day is the fairest day there ever was :
Only a fool would expect such a to-morrow.

NO MORNING

No morning, no morning,
The sun sleeps in a cloud,
And though a hundred factories blow
Broad rings of steam and sound,

No horn will wake the worker
Back to a world of smoke,
As the city rose uncloses now
Pale in its grimy cloak.

No morning, no morning,
The worker will not wake,
For cannon spoke to cannon
Long before day-break.

The steady rain of night still falls
Into open eyes,
But many who watched the setting sun
Shall never see it rise.

No morning, no morning,
Don't listen to the lark;
His song will scoff you when you beat
The hollow walls of the dark.

Though all your dreams be nightmares,
My love, my love, sleep on,
For the hand you thought was gentle
Lies rigid on a gun.

No morning, no morning,
No light will pass this way,
And though the factory hooter blows
No wheels will turn, to-day.

FOR SPAIN 1937

Love shaped those hearts to flaming bulbs of sun
Where godlike men toiled on the mountain side
Toil still, and peace through village and valley flowed
And green and red was the land of a people's pride

Weep now that desolate plain, that scarlet soil
Richer by all the shame and glory of death
Where honest eyes are bandaged tight with clay
And the proud cities broken and betrayed

For never shall sons of those brave peasants walk
Nor build their homes anew with victors' hands
For they lie forever unborn in the deep fields
In an ever still and ever warless land

May I who never spilt my blood nor fought
Save in myself, make all their battles mine,
And live for what they died for, nor forget
Their fate was human, but their faith divine.

BARCAROLLE

My love, my love, fair was the river
At noon in the high reaches,
Where the rills dropped through the clover
Over pebbles bright as peaches

On each side the elms the horses
Under us the frogs and fishes
And the west wind cutting losses
Ran as fast as lovers' wishes

Over all the sun was shining
Heightening smiles upon our faces
Till the shadows started climbing
Stealing all the country graces

Came the town the sirens hooting
Clouds of fire across the river
Marked the centre of the shooting
Marked our homes ablaze forever

Dark the ships above us glowered
While the scarlet tide was turning
Blood and bullets round us showered
Sparks and splinters from the burning

Factories where imprisoned workmen
Weaponless were killed like cattle
While along the quays their children
Ran in terror from the battle

My love my love foul was the river
When night fell between the piers
Where blood and gall ran with the water
And the sky dropped inhuman tears.

POEM

If all death on my head should fall
And through my bones and blood
The maggot and the worm should crawl
Eating this gift of god,

I do not think the world would turn
More surely than before
Nor Europe's fires more brightly burn
Nor rich men love the poor.

I would not die for the world, my dear,
Nor for the singing sky,
For not a star would shine more clear
Nor bird more sweetly cry.

But I would go for the love of you,
For you, sweetheart, alone,
For my soul will only rise to you
When I lay my body down.

SUMMER 1940

Hours like cinders fall away
Warm as a child's hands :
Silken fashions spangle streets
Lovers measure night and day.

My scholar's eyes grow blind with books
All history is theirs :
Through moonlight swim the slender planes
Spoiling sweethearts' dreams and looks.

I shall be dressed in darkness soon
So steal my fill of love
Building castles for my son
Feeding him with a silver spoon,

Praying no bomb will break our street
And us like paper flowers,
For when by me my darling sleeps
There was never peace like ours.

Only the battle in my mind
Turns the world inside-out :
There is a crying in the wind :
The heart of man beats on, unkind.

CONSCRIPT

FOR JEAN POISSON

DELICATE ingenuous his quivering blue eye
Mirrors the horizon of the condemned sky
Where burns all history in the bones of children
And fall tears of remorse and breaks the heart of heaven.

Mothered for pitted dunes and these livid grasses
He stands on the edge of murder motionless
As the green statues that to his fame shall moulder
With love's and death's stone wings touching his shoulder.

While all he meant to live for hides behind
The click of hell released by his unskilled finger,
Index of Europe's hand dyed red with honour
That wields the boy a puppet of its anger,

Tranquil the thrush sings on the twisted pylon
Its song unwinding the unbearable pattern
Of loss, fear, blood, night's aching empty arms,
Back to the heat of love, and the smell of home.

CALL-UP

THE trees bend to the railings. The ordinary birds sing.
A body of soldiers down the avenue
Swings spider's arms and legs. The sky is black and blue.
I am obsessed by old faces and places and familiar things.

I am obsessed by the fact that, till now, I lived here.
The house I can read with my eyes shut. Chairs sit, glass glints,
beds sprawl,
The table waits your hands with flowers and food. My dear
I read my past on your face, and my future on the wall.

The child constructs the present with the cat.
He cannot remember yesterday. He has no need to know
That to-day is just the beginning of to-morrow.
He has never pretended, like us, to know what's what.

Nor shall we ever know, perhaps, who too much cared.
We have just enough time to wonder and question each other,
To recognise that through living so long together
We have nothing left for the rest of the world to share.

To-morrow we shall be awkwardly alone.
You in your bed, but I in none, shall lie.
I shall be a colourless soldier marching by
The nameless suburbs of a danger zone.

To-morrow you can think about to-day.
How gently I looked upon your sideways face
As you were setting the china on the lace,
And how I turned, so suddenly and for ever, away.

ADDRESS TO A POET

FOR KENNETH ALLOTT

DEEP in the past is the listening to the lark
On the trespassed down
When I walked as a boy with corn above my head
And the immature town
Wore like a girl a green belt round the black
And an angel in a blue gown
Drove all the devils of fear from my bed.

And the dark corridors of school recede
Where spies and warders walked
And my hungry mouth has other mouths to feed
And our innocent talk
Is no longer of cakes and Christmas and the great escape
To home, but of the dead
And the coming of death, and murder, pillage and rape.

Why long for the lazy evenings by the river
When the bridge swung and bells clanged
Through the shadows, and the cheerful flattery of friends
Replaced for me the larks that so sweetly sang,
As portraits were painted and verses chimed in a fever
And the darling mistress smiled and hovered and clung,
And there was no end of love, and we were living for ever?

For the attic is closed and the faithless friends have departed,
You to Hampstead with a dazzling wife,
The mistress to fade in a school, and one to the air
To bomb the heart and beauty out of life,
While I sit here with my child in the highland weather
Learning the daily weight and cost of love,
And I see how little we knew about each other.

I see we forgot the poor and despised the blood
That makes and breaks a man,
And forgot the worm in the peach and the trap in the wood
And the ghost in the brain,
Who believed that the river ran for us alone
And for us alone the hills were piled with grain,
We forgot the hour of reckoning and the death bred in the bone.

Too late for regret when the wings of disaster are spreading
Over the homes and asylums of foolish Europe,
For it's our own blood and our love and our youth they are shedding
And our dreams and our hopes :
Yet the ivory towers were beautiful, they were not hollow
That our poets built up,
And we shall not fail, who have Goethe and Shakespeare to follow.

For they, like us, who have only one world for our children,
Have a stake in the war,
And though the bombs may shatter the pillars of heaven
Their voice shall endure
Not to the end, for there is no end to murder,
But beyond the end, when nothing but the core
Of truth shall stand triumphant over the slaughter.

And beyond the years of hatred we shall send love,
Break forts and frontiers and burn the flags
Till love's invisible column shall freely move
Across the forbidden seas and stolen crags
Of Europe, and from our broken bodies there shall rise
The future, humble and arrayed in rags
With all the tears of the dead in her blind eyes.